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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 QUITO 001403

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ANTI-BOLIVARIAN COMMENTS LEAD TO GOE DAMAGE CONTROL

1. (U) Summary: Public Administration Secretary Luis Herrera made televised remarks on June 10 criticizing Venezuela's Bolivarian movement and blaming it for causing instability in the region. The GOV protested orally and asked for a diplomatic response from the GOE. In an attempt to mend relations, Ecuador's Foreign Minister called his Venezuelan counterpart to clarify that any comments made were personal views and do not represent the GOE's position. Several groups are calling for Herrera's dismissal. Ironically, press reports claim that Herrera had participated in Bolivarian events as recently as November last year. End Summary.

"Horrible and Diabolical", Says Herrera

2. (U) Luis Herrera, presidential Public Administration Secretary, declared on television on June 10 that Chavez'

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politics were "horrible and diabolical" and threatened to destabilize the region. He also accused Chavez and his Bolivarians of having ties to the FARC. Media have suggested that perhaps Herrera was trying to stifle criticism that the current administration sympathized with Venezuela, rumors fueled by Patricio Acosta, a known Bolivarian supporter, being seen frequently around the presidential palace.

GOV Not Happy, GOE Reaches Out

3. (U) The statement was met with some measured protest from the GOV. On June 13, the Venezuelan Ambassador to Ecuador, Oscar Navas, said publicly that these comments did not need to harm bilateral relations, but that the GOV would want an official diplomatic response from the GOE, distancing itself from the comments. Press reported that GOE Foreign Minister Antonio Parra reached out to his counterpart on June 14 with a telephone call in order to reduce tension created by Herrera's statement. Parra explained that Herrera's declarations did not represent the GOE's views, and were strictly Herrera's personal opinions.

A Former Bolivarian Himself?

4. (U) El Comercio newspaper reported that Herrera had some Bolivarian ties himself. A June 14 article quotes General Rene Vargas, head of Ecuador's Pro Bolivarian Republic movement, as saying that Herrera participated in a November 2004 Bolivarian meeting and signed a document agreeing to work toward forming a "Great Latin-American Nation" inspired by Bolivarian thought. Press also reported Herrera's office recently contacted Vargas; it is rumored that Vargas was offered the Minister of Energy position. It is not clear if there is a connection between this contact and Herrera's statements.

Latest Developments

5. (U) Since this administration's beginning, Herrera was considered one of the people closest to Palacio; however, he has been maintaining a low profile since making his statements. He did not attend a June 14 Cabinet session, and was noticeably absent at the possession ceremony of new Presidential Secretary Max Donoso. Donoso criticized Herrera's comments soon after assuming his post, calling them "unfortunate" and said that relations with Venezuela were normalizing. Herrera also received criticism for failing to deliver a report on debtors due to the President this week.

Dismissal May Be Imminent

6. (SBU) Several social groups, including human rights organizations, have called for Herrera's dismissal. Embassy

contact Patricio Contreras of the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center told PolOff on June 14 that Herreria's dismissal was highly probable. One of the candidates the President was considering replacing him with is current Minister of Labor Galo Chiriboga. Gilberto Talahua, a leader of the indigenous Pachakutik party, has said that Herreria should apologize publicly. Pachakutik has looked positively at Chavez' Bolivarian project as an alternative for regional development.

Comment

17. (SBU) The GOE's reaction to Herreria's statements is more proof that the government goes out of its way not to offend its neighbors, Colombia excluded. Having miscalculated public and GOE reaction to his comments, Herreria will likely be replaced in the coming days, the third Palacio Cabinet casualty in ten days.
Kenney